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## THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE ENGLISH TEACHER

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It is but a few years since the teacher of English gained recognition as an important, even indispensable, member of any corps of high-school teachers. Gradually the authorities in charge of courses of study have increased the amount of time allotted to the study of our native tongue until it receives, even in backward states, as much attention as Latin or French or German. Today, when education in patriotism is receiving so much consideration, the work of the English teacher assumes even greater importance. His is the greatest opportunity for service in the making of loyal American citizens for the future. Even a history teacher, hearing what the Department of English had been doing in her own school, said, "I think it is unfair the Department of English should have so much more opportunity to do such work than we have!"

Many of us deplore the apparent increase of careless, conglomerate speech heard so generally in our cities that we wonder whether the language we were taught to consider English will be recognizable in common speech fifty years hence. It has been exceedingly difficult to impress the youth with the importance of "English pure and undefiled." Now, with the whole nation aroused to a sense of unity and national pride, with a tide setting in against the study of German in our elementary and high schools, we should be able to regain for English its rightful measure of attention, not only from school boards, but from the parents and the pupils. To many the reason why our language as a people is English, not something else, must be made clear. Never since the American Revolution has the feeling of kinship among English-speaking peoples been so strong; never has there been so great need of a close union.

Will not the pupil who is aroused to a sense of national pride by the events of the war, and of national interest by the participation of his relatives in stirring deeds, be responsive to an attempt to arouse his sense of appreciation of a great language, rich and flexible, for centuries the medium of expression of the ideas his countrymen are fighting for? Will he not awake to a sense of responsibility for keeping in a high state of excellence such a goodly heritage?

In the teaching of literature there is unlimited opportunity for the English teacher to increase in the pupils the sentiment and understanding of patriotism. Who can teach Washington's *Farewell Address* in these days without emphasizing such passages as these:

Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections.

Toward the preservation of your government, and the permanency of your present happy state, it is requisite, not only that you steadily discountenance irregular oppositions to its acknowledged authority, but also that you resist with care the spirit of innovation upon its principles.

The very idea of the power and right of the people to establish government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government.

The difference between our present participation in the World-War and the entangling alliances against which Washington warned us should be made clear. There are many abroad in the land who seek to confuse the ignorant.

It is natural that the children of those who came late to this land do not always realize the work done for them by our forefathers in the founding and building of this nation, a place of refuge for the oppressed of all countries, a place much better to live in than those from which many come. Webster's *Bunker Hill Oration* may well be used as a basis for driving this home. Does not the newcomer owe much to those who came before? Is not he responsible for helping to continue the building?

There is no need to speak of the value of the words of Lincoln to this generation. But is not the time ripe for more careful consideration of the industry and frugality as well as the sturdy principles of Benjamin Franklin? Now as well as then opportunity

for success and honor and distinguished service is open to the poorest who have the spirit and the character to overcome by the exercise of simple but worthy qualities.

To the writer, the teaching of Burke's *Speech on Conciliation with America* has always been a pleasure, because of the opportunity to bring out the clearness and strength as well as the skill of the argument, and the wonderful richness and variety of the language. But since the great war began it has been a still greater inspiration, because of the opportunity to clear up many misunderstandings. We have been careless to teach our youth that such statesmen as Pitt, Fox, and Burke, not George the Third and his henchmen, were representative of the spirit of England, a spirit which had won after centuries of struggle against the divine right of kings. Burke emphasizes the fact that the English subjects in America were seeking only the traditional rights of Englishmen in England, a fact too often overlooked in our histories and in our campaign oratory. Fox said that the success of the American Revolution was a greater victory for the cause in England than in America. A comparative study of the English and American cabinet and legislative systems and of the veto power of the executive may, through the boys and girls, help to overcome the prejudice some have against a republic fighting by the side of a monarchy for democracy. The lesson learned by England, shown in the present colonial government, has its reward in the loyalty of Canada, Australia, and South Africa. Such passages as "for some time past, the old world has been fed by the new," and "we remit some rights, that we may enjoy others," have abundant illustration in these times.

Those classics which some would lay aside for the new are giving fresh proof of their universal application. The life of Milton cannot be read even hurriedly without the realization of that noble, unhesitating sacrifice of eyesight and, as it then seemed, of a great poetic career, to the nearest duty to the nation. The lines in "Comus,"

She, good cateress,  
Means her provision only to the good,  
That live according to her sober laws,  
And holy dictates of spare Temperance,

may be used to show that intemperance which causes poverty is just as bad in the poor as is in the rich that other form of intemperance, greed; and that the education of all to temperate living might do more for the world than the arbitrary—and necessarily temporary—division of money.

It is not necessary to reject Milton because we may wish to read modern verse. After the study of the *Minor Poems* the pupils understand and enjoy much better the more recent verse. It is interesting to find that they nearly all think Milton greatest, and are very glad they read his poems first. The masques *St. Louis* and *The Sanctuary*, as supplementary reading, are proof that the form is not dead, but is used for patriotic festivals and may still even make use of mythology. The poems of Rupert Brooke and Alan Seegar are eagerly read, and Noyes and Kipling are always favorites. Oral reports on their love for their country and their sense of her duty help arouse the sense of patriotism. The poems of Sill, Bret Harte, Whitman, and Lanier may be used to illustrate not only poetic form but the use of one's own country, her scenic beauty and her democratic ideals, as poetic subjects. Whitman's "Manahatta" or "Crossing the Ferry" is read with interest, and his "Captain, My Captain" is loved by all.

It may seem a far cry from *Macbeth* to the present, but who can read the account of Scotland's suffering under the tyrant, as told by Macduff, without thinking of Belgium? Was not Macduff truly loyal to his country when he proved unwilling to support Malcolm, self-confessed as unfit to rule, until convinced that he had been misled by the test? Temptation, yielding to ambition, and retribution are just as truly a phase of human life today as in the tenth century. Indeed, here is the reason why the great classics are worth the most, for all time. They are universal in their portrayal of life—and never forgotten.

In Carlyle's *Essay on Burns* we again have the lesson of failure to reach the highest, through weakness and foolish aims. Is not the molding of character, through discussions of the "mud bath" as unnecessary to life, the tragedy of the lack of a "true religious principle of morals," the necessity of a single high aim for the physician, the teacher, the lawyer, the highest work for the

youth of our nation that any teacher can do? I know by years of experience that about 97 per cent of the pupils thoroughly enjoy this essay, when talked over freely and intimately, and vote that it should remain in the course of study. The fact that a poor plowboy could write such poetry, that he could see in the humble life around him, in the simple little daisy and the "auld mare," genuine poetry, is an inspiration. His expression of democracy fits as aptly now as then. His love of Scotland, his appreciation of her heroes, arouse a response in us.

American life need not be neglected. With *The House of the Seven Gables* there may be oral reports on Old Salem and on the old stories of witchcraft. A comparison of New England life then and today may be helpful. In connection with the *Sketch Book*, the service of Irving in bringing about a mutual understanding should not be allowed to go unnoticed, more than the local color of the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" or the use of American myth in that and "Rip Van Winkle." "Indian Character" may be used to show the danger of forgetting that we have on our history a stain to be wiped out by generosity to weak peoples. In connection with the *Sketch Book* and *Silas Marner*, several teachers in our school have worked out very interesting courses in rural life, based on supplementary reading and travel in England and our own country.

Is there any need to cast aside the old for the ephemeral novels and sketches of the present when the old is so rich in application to the life of today and in possibilities of comparison? There are still some evils of party spirit, as the Spectator thought. There are still raucous street cries. And the responsibility of "men of parts" is very great today.

But it is in composition that the work of Americanization can be carried on every day. Composition courses for a term based on "The Great War,"<sup>1</sup> on "The Greatness of Our Nation," on "The Ethics of Patriotism," may bring out, through careful assignment of concrete topics—each lesson unified, though the pupils may have a choice of several subjects—the ideals of the boys and girls, and may center their thoughts on their part in these stirring times.

<sup>1</sup> See *English Journal*, March, 1918, p. 207.

One course which we have put into operation includes The Story of the Pilgrims; Experiences of Early Settlers; Colonial Days; What English Liberties Meant to the Revolutionists; The History and Meaning of Our Flag; Our National Songs; A Land of Scenic Beauty; How Some of Our Great Men Rose to High Positions; The Promised Land; The Melting Pot; Why English Is and Must Remain Our Language; What America and American Ideals Mean to Us; What America Gives All of Us; What We Owe to America and to Society; and Our Preparation for the Highest Service. Various subtopics are assigned to individuals. Each lesson has a specific purpose, and the topics are so chosen that, together, they bring out this purpose, without "preaching" on the part of the teacher, but through the expression of the pupils themselves. Another course successfully used for older pupils was based on our own city: stories of her early history, descriptions of old buildings and of present-day scenes, expository outlines and essays on phases of the city government and life, and debates on questions of current interest.

Many of the lessons in such courses are used for oral reports. In these days current events may well be used for this work. Debates on questions of national interest not yet decided by Congress are very lively. If some one expresses ideas contrary to good government—anarchistic, for instance, in tone—or shows a misunderstanding of our principles, there is opportunity for the instructor to show, in criticism of the speeches, the weakness of reasoning or the wrong basic ideas. Few qualities are more needed for the future than the ability to see clearly the falsity of some ideas now much to the fore. Since woman suffrage is spreading year by year our girls, as well as the boys, must learn to discuss intelligently the questions of both local and national interest.

Senior essays may be chosen from a list of topics suggested by the instructor—one term on some phases of American history, another on our great industries, another on various topics connected with immigration, another on the work of the great war. Our girls have been wide awake to discover material concerning woman's work in the war, the work of the Y.M.C.A. in the war,

the Russian women warriors, Red Cross dogs, camouflage, the use of automobiles in the war, the uses of aeroplanes, etc.

We have had for some time a course in the history, nature, and use of periodicals. In this it has been possible to discuss the patriotic influence of periodicals, the effect of the war on periodicals, the work of the war correspondent, the value of the periodicals to us in our search for information, the proposed censorship of the press, and the proposed increase of rates on second-class matter. It is very easy to guide the pupils to the best, the most trustworthy newspapers and magazines, through their own discussions.

In fact, the possibilities for free class discussion, inspired and guided by the instructor, are endless, and are often worth many hours of routine work. But the teacher must be up to date and very much alive. He must be ready to seize the opportunity of a chance question which he has not foreseen, to arouse the interest of the class naturally and call out opinions. He must be on the alert for fallacies, for unpatriotic sentiments possibly, and ready to turn the discussion by his own comments or questions. Thus the pupils will find the lesson hour, whether literature or composition, the most enjoyable and quickening of the whole day, and be trained, unconsciously, in quick thought and speech as well as for good citizenship. In no other course in the high school is there such abundant opportunity for patriotic work. Are we, as English teachers, ready to do our part in the building of a great nation for the future, one and indivisible, but one of alert minds and intelligent voters?